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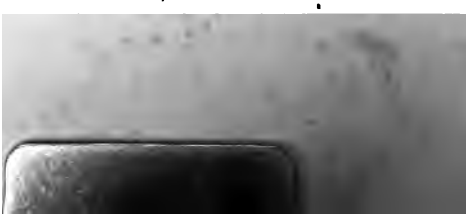
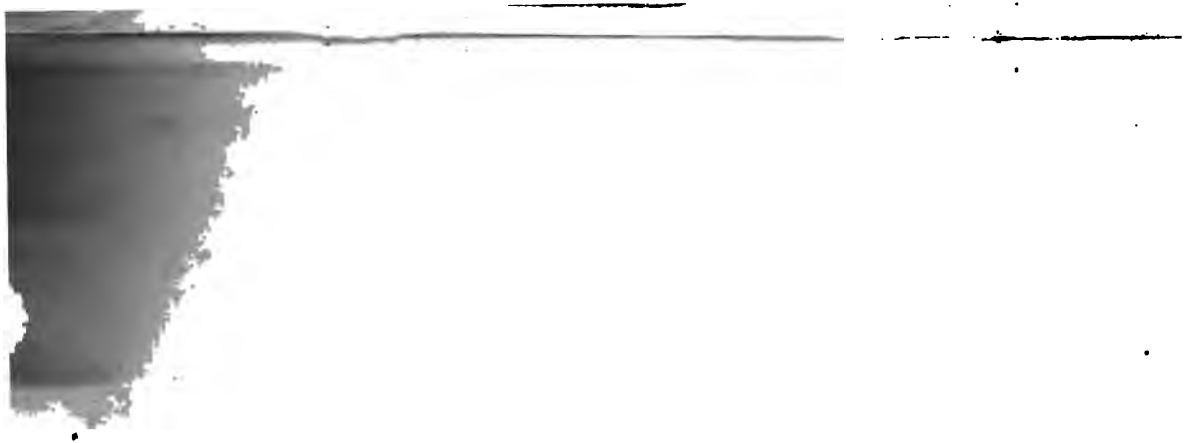
"He seems to be a stranger: but his present is
A withered branch, that's only green at top."





THE VILLAGE LIFE.

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MDCCCLXXIX.

THE VILLAGE LIFE.

"HE SEEMS TO BE A STRANGER: BUT HIS PRESENT IS
A WITHERED BRANCH, THAT'S ONLY GREEN AT TOP."
Shakespeare.

GLASGOW:
JAMES MACLEHOSE, ST. VINCENT STREET,
Publisher to the University.
1879.

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THOUGH poor the gift to one so brave,
So loving, with a soul that rose
In radiant intellectual sway
Over its wide surrounding woes;
And tempered true, like ancient glaive,
To bend, and back with vigour spring;
Beloved Mother, let me lay
On thy dear grave this offering.

GLASGOW, SEPTEMBER, 1879.

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THE VILLAGE LIFE.

Prologue.

GO, little book, without pretence
Vain-glorious, and make thy way
In the thick crowded world to-day!
But scantily endowed thou art—
None better than thy maker knows—
In the great press to bear a part;
But as thy strength is, go thou hence,
And "dree thy weird" unto its close,
Whate'er the weird may hap to be,
Struggle and death, or victory;

Or that sore-doomed and wretched fate—
The passing interest of an hour,
And afterwards the blameless state
Among the thousands lost or slain.
How few of those at silent rest
In the Republic's shades unblest
And nameless graves, return again?

For though perhaps a latent power
Of life, that far within the deep
Of death and utter darkness, may
Through ages long defy decay,
And raise old thoughts to happy light,
And welcome, and rekindled youth,
That happiness is for the gods
Of Literature! for those who sweep
The future with far-seeing sight
And catch a glimpse of far-off truth.

Dead books lie dead; or at the most
They only re-appear again,
From long forgetfulness uptost
Like corpses from the troubled main,
To strand upon a distant coast
And seek a second burial.

Go then, thou little book of mine,
And add a new grave to the dead,
"Unwept, unhonoured," and unread,
Save by thine author, who in vain
Will look for fame from worth of thine.

The lives of books, like lives of men,
Are short and long, are fast and slow,
But die they must, or soon, or late;
And even those that seem to grow
In beauty with the centuries,
And barely show the touch of age,

Are not immortal, cannot be.
Decay will come by sure degrees,
And at some distant future date,
The now strong-hearted living page
Will find its everlasting sleep
Upon the ever-rising heap
Of waste, that Time behind him leaves—
The Ages' mighty Dust-bin—not
Before its purpose is fulfilled,
And its last lesson man receives;
Absorbs and grows from, and forgets.

Is that a compensating thought
For the unlucky and unskilled?
May they not boast that though the frets
Of one day's life in scores have killed
The creatures of their brains—the pure
Ephemera of Literature—

That they have lived and duty done
And died?

And what among the years
The race of man has spent on earth,
And yet will spend, is a brief day
Or a brief thousand years or so?
One passes, and the other goes;
One in the glitter of the sun
With a few gasps 'twixt birth and death,
The other through the storms and tears
Of many lustres, rising slow
To power, and sinking to the grey
Of age, and then its lasting close,
Fame quenched for both, for nought remains.

Nay something lasts, and lasts as well
For the ephemera as for kings
Of thought, with long enduring reigns.

A science law demonstrates clear
That every act, however weak,
Liberates force, that spreads around,
And as it spreads in sphere and sphere,
Even to creation's utmost bound,
Change follows. The remotest star
Is moved by every stone we throw,
Perhaps by every word we speak.

So in the universe of mind,
A thought expressed will reach as far
And bear its influence; it is force,
And force of the sublimest kind,
Inducing change through all its course,
Affecting all intelligence,
Till the last throb of brain shall show
Expiring reason, soul, and sense.

And with these random musings fired,

I send thee out, my timid child,
Into the wide and dangerous wild
Of Letters, unacknowledged too.
Fair be the path thou dost pursue,
And soft thy rest when thou art tired!
The parent's eye will watch thy way—
For guide he cannot—and will shed
A secret tear when thou art dead,
And "mingling with thy kindred dust":—
Then *Vale! Vale!* go thou must.

The Village.

YOU see the village from the moor.
A long descent by narrow path—
White in the sun it glisteneth—
Leads to the dwellings of the poor,
Embosomed in the leafy trees.
And flowing through with pebbly ease
A little trouting burn is seen,
Its grassy banks the village green:
A pleasant place when summer weaves
With flow'ry weft the grassy sod,

And hangs the elm and ash with leaves,
Rustling around the cottage eaves,
When soft winds breathe abroad;
Most beautiful when golden light
Shines from the western sky at night,
And lights the face of children fair
Who play beside the stream, or round
The trees in merry jingo-ring
Go dancing, till their glossy hair
Is shaken loosely o'er their eyes.
There, maidens croon and young men sing,
And old men gabble over pipes,
And old wives chatter with old wives,
And all the bright light glorifies—
Young life and old life hallowed there
By golden beauty of the trees,
By shining grass, by purple cloud,
By mellow rainfall, by the breeze
That turns the leaves and stirs the locks,

By deepening shadows of the night,
By the blue sky and starry light;
Ideal gleams of heaven and earth
Play round the humble cottar's hearth.

Descend with me, a little while,
The homes of homely men to see,—
Here half-way is a broken stile,
And gushing bright, and clear, and free,
Out of the red sand by its side,
A shallow well invites to drink.
A moment pause upon its brink,
Or stoop recumbent on the knee,
With planted hands outstretching wide,
Like the select of Gideon's band;
And dipping face and lapping tongue
Into the fountain, understand
How thirst was slaked when earth was young,
And the wine cup was yet unsung.

This is the trysting well and stile;
Here may be seen the village maid
At gloaming, half afraid to stay,
Yet trusting that not far away,
Some one is coming to beguile
A sweet brief hour with her; and shade
His and her eyes of gleaming love,
With modest shawl drawn close above
Their leaning heads, and arms that lock
Each other in. Too soon the clock
From village homes sounds out the hour
That separates, and seems to mock
The love that binds them in its power.

And legends, too, there are to tell,
Old legends of the stile and well—
What well, or trysting place has not
Its antique story, deftly wrought
From fancy and from fact? Somehow

The poet lingers there, and weaves
From ancient myth and modern fact
A tragic tale, or comic act—
A ghostly narrative that leaves
A faint sensation even now
That something eerie is about—
Something that tempts the maiden out,
That draws her to the place where love
Was in the olden time supreme,—
Tragic or happy, matters not—
She hopes the best, and hopes, in sooth,
That love, all love, will be her lot.
The village swain, he too may deem,
With half bold superstitious face
The while he meets her, that the place
Is sacred to the trust and truth
And triumphs of dear innocence,
And awed he may be by the sense
Of time and place, and legend old.

Now we have drunk, and ruminate,
Not on the tales the charmed relate;
But on the youth and love that glow
Around the trysting place, and throw
The warmth of true romance upon
The humble villagers below.

Here each has sought his careful mate,
And placed her on his homely throne;
Both may be old, and grown sedate,
But still may catch the sense of youth,
The sense of love, the while they pass
The spot where love was linked to truth;
Or think of daughters waiting there,
Or sons who wander o'er the grass,
With passions opening to the air.

The Schoolmaster.

DESCENDING still, we reach the Howe,
Quite near the village. It is now
A poor old ruin of a house,
Two gables standing, and between
A mass of rubbish, that the sheen
Of summer flowers and weeds conceal.
Its latest tenant none will rouse;
He sleeps securely, with the seal
Of God between his patient brows,

Down in the village graveyard there,
No stone above his ridgy "lair."

Old and alone, without the prop
Of wife or child, he tottered down
Into the grave, and ended so,
A lonely not uncheerful life,
A life of labour crowned with hope.
A teacher, once of some renown
In half a dozen parishes;
A humble servant of the state,
He taught the "R's" with care and pains
To dullish youths, and when he found,
A lad of more capacious brains,
And quick of wit, with morals sound,
His joy was pure, his zeal was great.
Most lovingly he drew him on,
Through reading, writing and the slate;
Through weary "use and wont," until

He saw him safely on the hill
Of higher learning, digging deep
In Cæsar's Commentaries; or
Exploring Virgil's sybil leaves,
That safe in precious music keep
Till latest suns shall dawn upon
The latest race of thinking men,
That older, ripened world of thought;
From which our ranker world has grown;
Or learning the light-hearted song
Of the gay Roman; or among
The deeper-thinking bards of Greece,
Her sophists and philosophers,
In culture that was only hers,
Seeking the great tongue's rich increase.

And many a youth the teacher passed,
Fired with the love of classic lore,
From toilsome plough-tails, from the "last,"

From tailor's board, from planing bench,
And many menial labours more,
On to high honours and degrees
At famous Universities.

And when the summer days returned
And brought them back again to toil,
Sweetened by the "Humanities,"
They dearly felt the welcome earned
From the old teacher—felt his hand
Pass o'er their heads with tender touch.
He did not praise them over much—
They knew his ever watchful care
Over their studious inner lives;
He drew them to him after hours,
Went with them in their evening walks,
Grew young in their inspiring talks,
Himself inspiring them, by showers
Of fertile questioning that revives

And amplifies their college lore,
And wafts upon their pleasant strolls
A gentle, balmy, classic air.

And when they entered, joyous, keen
On the long struggle, and the strife
The fates ordain for every life,
The agony of learning o'er—
How ardently their rise was seen
By the old man! How quick his sight
Caught the first triumphs of the fight;
For some were thund'ring in the Kirk,
And some were pleading at the Bar,
And some were writing thoughtful books,
And some were travelling afar
Away in Geographic mirk,
And some in learning's obscure nooks
Were plodding drearily alone,
All stimulated by his word

Of generous encouragement,
That struck the right responsive chord
Within their souls, and sent them on
In their true bias and intent.

So sped his happy village days,
And many an honest modest fame
He loved to boast of, and to name—
The fame of brave lads he had caught
From rustic toil, and sagely taught.

Ever some clever youth to raise
Fresh expectations, the reward
Of days and months of labour hard
In the dull pedagogic round
He hoped to find, and mostly found;
For rarely was the parish school
Without at least a Latin boy,
His mother's pride, his teacher's joy,

And destined some day to expound
The Calvinistic faith and rule.

I see him now, the master still,
A shabby pedant if you will,
With rumpled hair, and wrinkled face,
And full grey eyes, beneath a brow
Rounded and high, and just a trace
Of humour on the working lips;
Round chested, and round shouldered; dressed
In rusty clothes of ancient cut.
Oft when the school-house door was shut,
He took me kindly as his guest
Into his book-encumbered room,
And talked with all his soul a-flame,
On many a theme, of many a name
I only feebly grasped or knew,
Until the shadows deeper grew
And settled into evening's gloom.

And there I learnt to understand
His curious theories of creeds,
Of ancient worships, bold and grand,
With, even in their errors, store
Of living thought and quickening lore.

Though hemmed-in with religious life—
Village religion—and ordained
By his position to partake
A little in its shows and strife,
Within his heart it never reigned.
Its yoke sat lightly on him too,
He shook it off as one would shake
The dust from off his coat, while down
He settled to his quiet thoughts,
His ancient folios and his notes.

His mind was with the older gods,
The gods of Greece; or older still,

The gods of Aryan renown,
Great Nature-gods; conceptions vast
And simple of the glowing brain
Of the young world's imperial race,
While in its primitive abodes.

They moved within the distant past,
Mighty, majestic, primal forms
That child-like awe and wonderment
Shaped of the dawn, of day and night—
Shaped of the sun, and moon, and sky,
Of clouds, and thunder, rain and storms,
Of sleep with visions dark and bright,
Of death's enduring mystery—
The facts of nature realised
In broad poetic splendour, blent
With the grey hues of daily life;
The life of men of Mount and Plain,
Herd-tending, rearing, breeding, and

Subduing with a mastering hand
The savage tribes of brutes and men.

A sympathy that half agreed
The teacher had, with this grey creed
Our far-off ancestors believed,
And its more polished form, relieved
By happier life, and larger ken,
And fairer fancies, on the shores
And in the isles of the Great Sea:
There, wisest thought and word and deed,
Through glorious war and fertile peace,
In lusty vigour and in glee
Grew like the growth of tropic spores,
Into the splendid life of Greece.

What wonder that this simple soul,
Long pondering o'er the ancient time,
The gods, and god-like it contains,

All moving to the stately roll
Of measured numbers musical,
Or cadences of classic prose;
All with the early nobleness
That large and simple life retains,
Should feel his spirit drawn thereto
And rest serene in its repose?—
Should feel that high above the stress
Of warring sects, from stiff-necked Jew
And speculating Gentile, from
The fierce commingling of the creeds
That jangled round St. Peter's Dome,
Dogma with dogma striving fell,
Science sinking in the strife,
And superstitions rising rife—
There towered still Olympian heights
On which the blissful gods remained;
That the bright sky of India
Its older deities detained—

Still with their attributes a-fresh
From Nature's bosom; human-like
As clothëd with the thrilling flesh
Of men and women, and inspired
By men and women's highest thoughts—
Thoughts touching and interpreting
With pious awe the miracle
Surrounding them, that still surrounds
Us of a later, better date,
When Science and Religion shell
Each other's camp, and both dilate
On the destruction that abounds?

For the old master would not praise
The double thousand years of war,
Cruel in word, bloody in deed,
In which from a fresh spiritual seed
A livelier stem of faith had shot.
He could not see that progress moves

Slow upward upon jar and jar,
And dies in old appointed grooves;
For every problem harder got,
And more insoluble, revealed
A corpse-like aspect to his soul.

But in the early faith he saw
A grasp at Nature keen and fast,
No puzzling over law and law,
But holding to her bosom vast,
And reading in her spacious face
Tokens of beauty and of grace,
Eternal attributes of power,
Of tenderest love and wildest hate
And the indifference of fate.

What more had human kind thro' years
Of painful agonies of thought—
Of changing faiths, exchanged in tears

And bloodshed, for its torture got?
Philosophies had come and gone,
Some dead and buried, some alive
Like marvellous frog in marvellous stone—
Coffined in old and unread books;
And some, retouched and modified
By many a philosophic pen,
Still lingered in the thoughts of men;
But none had ever yet descried
New dawn within the dark, or seen—
However bright and sharp and keen
The intellectual gaze had been—
Farther than old and weary eyes
Of the forgotten centuries.

Call explanation what you will,
Cult, creed, philosophy, or dream
Poetic, mythologic, or
A holy script of cosmic lore,

'Tis but an explanation still.
All to the musing teacher told
The self-same tale of mystery.
But in high preference he held
The nature gods of Aryan mould,
As lasting types of force and law.
Their shapes at morning dawn he saw,
When in his early walks alone,
Upon the level of the moor,
The coming god of day drove on
Bright-tinted clouds before him; till,
At length revealed in azure pure,
He greeted holy heaven and earth.
Their shapes he saw at fading light,
When sadness, the dark twin of mirth,
Came with the dawn of sacred night—
He saw them rise upon the sky
In moon and stars and moving clouds;
Great shapes that new philosophy

Had vulgarised to common crowds,
By vulgar scientific terms.
What though to him the forms were dim,
And breathing face and heavenly limb
Had vanished, yet they still expressed,
In shadowy form, the highest quest
Of nature's grail—the quest of Pan,
For in his secret heart, the man
Stood naked to himself confessed,
Old Pagan, or new Pantheist.

No doubt the simple teacher erred.
He erred because he failed to see,
Within the past, the tender shoot
Of a new faith rise bold and free
From Judah's long surviving root,
Growing like grain of mustard seed,
And through the dark and vicious reign
Of Pagan Roman, Pagan Goth,

Flourishing with a vigorous stem
Above decay of heathen creeds,
And overtopping all of them.
A faith that slow and surely sheds
The rankness of its earlier growth,
Becoming fairer as it spreads,
And more divine as men become
Humane—

That with its law of love,
And its new mercy sweeter far
Than ever blest the poor and weak
Of the great ages; with its peak
Of hope immortal, piercing to
A future life; its avatar
Of God on man revealed through One
In whom the human and divine
Blend perfect in one perfect whole—
Surrounds and fills the orb of soul.

But though the master's steady gaze
Down through the ages missed its scope
And never felt its high import,
He lived its life, in humble sort,
Unselfish, loving, in control
Of strictest duty all his days.

The school is gone, and in its stead
A brand new structure you may see,
Northward a little, on the top
Of yonder knoll. There is a Board
Of priests and laymen, who transact—
With much uproarious gravity—
Under the Education Act,
The school affairs; and harshly lord
It o'er the master, young, and bred
In training college for his sphere,
And deft at passing all his youths
Through state inspection most severe.

He drills them in the "R's," and gives
A finish of scientific truths
And facts—of this and that a touch
Brought down to day and date, not much
Of the mythologies; and lives
To turn them out, and draw his fees
And grants. Nay, he can also teach
The smarter boys a little French,
A little German, and with ease
A bit of Euclid. That is now
The newer way that youths are led
And intellectually bred.

New times bring changes, and the wrench
From old to new; and yet somehow
The old is pleasant to the old,
And board and code and teacher smart,
The fresh machinery of the art,
Look like machinery dead and cold.

My Lady.

MY lady's gate the village ends,
Where, thro' the Gothic avenue,
Is caught a bough-encumbered view
Of an old mansion large and gray.
Fairy built it looks when day
Is dying on the distant moor,
And its ivied wings are spread away
In the sedgy lake that lies before.
The lady of the manor, too,
Is old and slight and fairy-like,

And with two piercing eyes of blue,
Sheathed in deep wrinkles, glances out,
Beneath a green shade, bound about
Her comely brows and whitening locks.
Strange-altered world your fancy mocks,
My lady, in these latter days;
Its wicked pace you leave alone
And quietly keep old-fashioned ways;
You only note its furious speed
By turning up at time of need
The old green shade, to glance awhile,
Then pull it downward with a smile.

My lady's griefs are at an end;
Her heart, in widowhood, is bent,
On nursing well her large estate,
Sore burdened by her thoughtless mate
When both were young, and he would spend.
But, when the old Squire struck his tent,

The calm, succeeding years of storm,
Sweetened her life, and now she reigns,
A sharp old queen in her domains,
Does everything in business form,
Improves, and plants, and drains, and bores
Below the soil for iron ores
And fields of coal; knows how to turn
The hidden wealth to good account
By lease and lordship; understands
The drifts and levels, seams and bands
Of all the workings underground,
And calculates the net amount
That every pit and mine should earn.

Her farms are mostly poor in soil,
Yielding but scanty crops to toil
Incessant and laborious.
But she has taught her farmers skill
In cropping and manurings new,

And for reward of all their pains
They find a fair result of gains.
My lady does not grudge them these,
She knows her time will come, when lease
Expiring upon lease will place
Re-letting in her power and grace.
How keenly then she will review
The rentals, and decide increase:
Not turning the rack-renting screw,
But gently, yet with force of will
That nothing sentimental bends;
She will not part with tenants old
If she can help it, and they make
An offer that, though hard, breaks not
The gentle increase of their store.
Should they have worked with care and skill.
And look to make a better start
On a new lease, she plays her part
Of sweet encourager before,

And afterwards a bit of scold
With her economies. Yet, strange,
Few fail with her, or like to change.
She has the nice and useful gift
Of striking the true mean of thrift,
Of judging where to press and pause,
Where to be stubborn, where to yield,
Where to be patient, when to cause
The separation of all ties—
Subtle tactician.

In her field
Of business vision large and clear
Rise ever the fair images
Of debt extinguished, mortgages
Wiped out, and the estate as free,
As when fair gifted by a deed
Far back among the centuries,

Done by a royal hand it came
To a forefather of great name.

Why should my lady work so much
For her estate, when but a touch
Of light disease might end her care?
Agëd she is, and ever speeds,
The short hours till the close of day,
The close of life, when all our needs
Are but an oak-shell. Why should she
Hoard with an avaricious air?
She never felt the miser's joy
As heap on heap the treasured gold
Rose higher, goodly spoils of thrift
And personal penuriousness.
She hoarded only for her boy,
Thought of the time she would not see
When he who had not shared her gift
Of worldly wisdom, would be free

Of all annoying, long arrears,
And in his secret bosom bless
Th' unselfish love of many years.

My lady rules the village too,
A kindly, half despotic rule.
She knows each villager, and knows
How to approach him, wise or fool.
Counsel she gives, and counsel true,
And often followed; in her reign
Village affairs go smoothly on.
She shows a man-like tolerance
In dealing with the simple folk,
And ne'er brings peril to her throne
By edicts which their habits shock;
She peers, with kindly, restless glance,
Under the green shade in their homes,
And questions fast, while slow replies
Show truth will come where candour comes.

The old she cares for with the crumbs
That in no careless measure fall
From the broad table of the Hall;
And all-observant as she roams
Her charity is not misplaced,
But goes with judgment and with taste.

My lady is not saintly. No;
She never was a penitent.
She never groaned for sins, nor spent
A sleepless night of cruel woe
About her soul; her soul is whole
And sound and healthy, strong and free,
Though somewhat worldly for her years.
Pangs, strivings, hopes, and bitter fears
Of the beyond—the awful goal
Of human life—were not within
The compass of her consciousness.
Was she not fairly good? Had sin

Of every sort by her clear sense,
Howe'er alluring its pretence,
Not been repelled with easy scorn?
Maid, wife, and widow, night and morn
Her life had passed—a pattern life
Of duty done and doing. She
Scarce looked into futurity,
Or looked without the sense of pain.
Clear business soul, sharp business brain,
It knew no conflict save the strife
Material that ever springs
From contact with unworthy things,
From ancient customs long retained
When nothing good of them remained.

A grave and worthy worshipper
In the Old Kirk, she liked it well;
Its quiet, broad, and easy ways
And toleration, suited her.

It had its place in stable things,
A stately place just like her own,
Not to be touched by any fell
New fingers evangelical,
Far reaching in these latter days.
A keen superior contempt
She felt for movements new to hand,
And threatening attitudes of men
Who once decisive took their stand
By Kirk and State, and fought their cause;
She did not fear that voice or pen,
Or project dreamed or to be dreamt,
Would e'er reverse our ancient laws.

My lady's old, and cannot change;
New views, that breast the modern time,
Or, in their far-extending range,
Take in a future that will come
Some day, when harmony prevails

In the great multitudinous hum
Of party voices, lay outside
The utmost circle of her thoughts.
For with her business freedom, wide
And wise, she is conservative,
But eagerly observes and notes
The tendencies that live and grow
And threaten with increase to give
The final push, and overthrow
To all she holds supreme and dear.
She likes them not, and strong believes
That State and Kirk and Land shall ne'er
Dissevered and unblest and free
Become the sport of mobs; for then
Would come an awful day of wrath,
That shrivelling up—like autumn leaves
The early frost and rime have touched—
The threefold blossom of our power,
Would bring a swift and sure decay,

Corruption rapid, red, and smutched
With death-spots. She would turn away
With loathing from the coming hour
Of doom, she in her fancy saw,
Should innovators fierce prevail
On the fixed order and the law.

My lady has her settled views
None may successfully assail;
And all opposing argument,
However specious and profuse,
Convincing, popular, is spent
In vain upon her shielded mind.
She heeds the agitators not;
Their bolts fall harmless, like the hail
That rattles on a coat of mail.

So lives she with a high intent
To free her lands, and leave her son

To fill the place his fathers won
In other times—to do the right
And hold her own, and, above all,
The poorer people with her sway
Maternal and beneficent,
To rule in reason and with might.
A little despot, you may say,
And just a bit tyrannical.

There you may see her through the trees,
With light step walking speedily
To feed her swans upon the lake,
That come and from her fingers take
The dainty morsels greedily.
How smart and trim and at her ease
My lady looks—old-fashioned too!
But sweet and wholesome in her age;
No vulgar pride, or air untrue,
Is present with the dear old sage.

She sees us, and with notice bland,
And gracious brow, she passes on;
Long may the village feel her hand!
Far off the day when she is gone!

The Blacksmith.

HERE, on the outskirts of the wood,
We reach the village smithy—hear
The ring of hammers, see the glow
Upon the hearth, and in the shed
Cart wheels and ploughshares, old and red
With rust, a grindstone large and good,
An iron circle true to throw
The hot rim of the wheel upon,
And give it truth of form when cool.
The cottage joins the smithy, fair

With climbing plants in open bloom;
And at the windows blossom rare
Geraniums, mixing their perfume
With homely scents. A pretty home,
Busy and frugal—and its lord?
Ah! at the anvil see the smith,
See the broad grimy brow all scored
With heavy drops of sweat that fall
Quick hissing on the iron hot,
Each time his hairy arm brings down
A mighty stroke that shakes the spot,
And owns the brawny wielder's pith.

Substantial steadfast man was he,
Who shod the horses, forged the ploughs,
Who tilled the glebe that kept his cows,
Stern in his ways, as ought to be
The father of a filling house.

But when you see him toss his tongs
Down in the trough to rest awhile,
Then look about him with a smile,
And ask at last with rasping lungs
Something of a contentious sort,
Expect brave controversial sport.
Begun at first with cautious wile
To stave the issue off a while,
Sly hits the loutish audience know,
And laugh and swing them to and fro;
But soon the bellows, blowing bright,
Whitens the argument; and right
Down ring the disputatious blows,
Swift, bright, and thick the sparkles whirr,
And, flying to the rafters, wake
The lurking rats into a stir—
Justly the end of high debate,
When rats have lodgings in the state.

A man of great renown the smith,
His ready tongue, his arm of pith,
His rugged face, his honest eye,
His pride, untouched by vanity,
His sturdy reasonableness, the stand
He takes for doctrines old and grand,
Make him the village head and chief.
Some glimpses of the newer light,
Some glimm'rings from the science sphere,
Some crude conceptions, caught in brief,
Of the new Faith and the new Sight,
To Evolutionists so dear,
Had reached him. But think not that these
Disturbed the adamantine base
On which his faith is founded fast.
Why, is he not a Calvinist?
Believing in th' Eternal Will
Whose purposes the worlds fulfil,
Order, and law, and Will Divine

Were one to him; and God's decree
The root of a vast living tree,
Branching and intertwisting wide,
And filling all the ages—still,
A growing trunk whose mystery
Was solved by the ascending sap
From fountain-thought of Deity.

Just as the little touch of life,
That differentiates monads
From wastes of matter, gives the strife
That leads to growth and slowly adds,
Throughout long ages, higher types
Of life and being; but the spring
And source of all is the deep thing
That brightens into movement specks
Of primal dirt;

The smith would say

The source was the divine decree,
Impregnating with potent germ
His great creations. There the term
Of evolution sank at last
And closed in the creative Will.

Strong logic, sharpened at the fires
Of old divines who lived and wrote
While yet geology was not,
He had acquired and used it well;
He saw with them that thought inspires
All nature, makes it what it seems—
Is the true germ spot in the cell
Of being; deep implanted germ
By the great Sovereign Infinite,
Whose word of everlasting might
Is law sure fixed, that ever was
And ever will be, and His word,
The word of the creating Lord,

Is but a name for His decree,
Conceived from all eternity;
The all-efficient primal cause
Of past, and present, and to be.

Thus from a central soul supreme,
Ever existing, and alone,
The Kernel of the universe—
In time spread forth, the outcome vast
Of an august immortal scheme,
Planned in th' immeasurable past.
This was the basis of the views,
In metaphysic language terse,
That lay below old terms profuse,
And pious diction—basis broad
And deep—the Sovereignty of God.
And far above it had been built
A tow'r that reached to heaven high,
Shapely and strong, that pleased the eye,

Observant, critical of those
Who knew the rock on which it rose.
The Scottish Calvinistic creed
In its old form, the smith held fast
On its old basis, and he frowned
On all departures, old and new;
They only seemed to him to cast
The shadow of dark doubts around
Th' imperishable and ever true.
Was not God, God, and infinite?
Did He not will all things to be?
Did not Omniscience foresee
The first and last, and seeing planned
And executed in His might,
What He foresaw and so ordained?
And thus the worlds and all contained
Within them was His own command.
Evil and good, whatever is
Is there through Him, is only His;

Infinite power could not create
In other wise the all of things;
And if a God we postulate,
We have all that His being brings.
But power infinite, sovereignty,
Are not alone His attributes—
Infinite fatherhood and love,
Infinite righteousness above
All human thought are His as well;
Infinite justice, that decides
Remorselessly, impartially;
Infinite mercy, that abides
For sinner blackest in his guilt;
Infinite hate of sin that dooms
To sure destruction in a hell,
Prepared before the angels fell,
Reserved for those whose evil fate
Is to be hated and to hate.

But then the glorious Infinites
Of Justice, Mercy, Love, and Hate
Of sin, and awful Sovereignty,
Commingling in the soul Divine,
Must have their poise and centre point,
On which they mutually meet,
And harmonize and balance fine;
And from this centre point came forth
The plan of Christ—redemption's plan,
Unfolding the Divine estate
Of the creation and of man,
When first they stood at His command
In the virginity of life,
New fashioned by a perfect hand.
His own creation could not be
But infinitely good and fair.
Too soon came disobedience, bold,
Defiant of the Maker, strife
And all the evils manifold,

Ordained by the Divine decree
As sequences of guilt; and then
Infinite Mercy came to share
In disposition of the scheme,
And found a way of life for men—
A sacrifice that wiped away
All claim of Justice by its blood—
The sacrifice of God revealed,
In weakness of the human clay;
But for the chosen only—those
Who in the everlasting dream
Of Godhead, ere the world began,
Had been appointed, signed and sealed,
For highest blessings; all the rest
Foreseen, through sin, to be unblest,
Will downward sweep, by awful ire
Pursued to the eternal fire
Consuming evil.

But when all
The blotted life of man is gone;
When saints are saved and sinners damned,
A new creation will assume
A lovelier aspect, sweeter bloom
Than the first Eden state; the Throne
Of the God-Man will be supreme
And, everlastingly secure,
Will everlastingly endure.
And thus the purpose, from the first
Resolved upon, will be fulfilled,
And man no more shall be accurst,
All will be as the Maker willed,
And in true unison combine
With Infinite attributes divine.

With vice-grip grim and fast the smith
Held to this creed, this Christian fate
Ordained, of blessedness and woe

To be, in the world's substance so,
And the resplendent perfect state.
He saw within it clear and true
The centre substance and the pith
Of cosmic systems old and new,
However comprehensive they,
In wisdom, learning, and display
Of logic, or of evidence.
His God you might eliminate,
But still things were, as it He were
A centre and a source intense
Of all creation; there was still
A something high that could not err
Creating, shaping destinies,
And what but the Eternal Will?

Rugged, unyielding, straight, and stout,
In his defence the smith would stand,
Grasping with his far-reaching hand

Through the thick growths that hedge it round,
And keep the weak and feeble out,
The inner truth—the purpose sound.

The Parish Clerk.

HIS neighbour, session-clerk and wright,
Rich, hard, and greedy as the kite,
A "little touched," the village said,
And some were of him half afraid.
His face and hair, as brown as dust,
His joints grown stiff with aged rust;
Deep witch-like eyes that lurked within
The ashen cobweb of his skin,
Talked often to himself they say—
Nay, seldom talked except that way;
Or to his calves, or to his cows,
Would kindly whisper as they browse.

But his was a true hidden life
The village knew not of, or dreamed;
It only knew him, as he seemed,
A self-engrossed and lonely man.
He was a mystic, and had read
Deep in the stores of learning dead.
He had his faith—he had his plan
Confused with many a mingling light,
Crossing from many a sage's sight,
From spiritualistic visions grand,
From insight, might be half-insane;
He saw in night and morning walks,
By stream and moor, by tarn and shaw,
Frail phantoms of the other world,
That moved beyond the reign of law.
The timid light of dawn revealed,
The gathering mists of night concealed,
Phenomena that none but he
Could see, or hope or wish to see.

All fairy tales were loved and true,
All ghostly stories, old and new,
Were as the facts of life to him;
And not a mossy wall, a cliff,
A linn, a pool, a Druid stone,
A knotted oak, with heart all gone,
A fairy ring, frilled round with fern,
But had its legend, gay or stern.
He knew them all—aye, even felt
That still old influences dwelt
Around them. He could plainly hear
The light feet of the fairies near,
And saw the wraith that legend told
Glared from the big bole of the oak,
Or squatted sad and white and cold
On the grey boulder, that, wise folk
Maintained, stood over stores of gold.

These were the fringes of his faith.

Beyond their light frivolities
His wizard spirit penetrates,
And through the portals of the night
Discovers all the lands of light.
His dreams were as his waking states;
In truth his spirit woke in dreams.
The life was real he lived in them,
And all the outer circumstance
That his wise neighbours knew him by
Was but his dim and hazy trance.

His ways were in the other world,
And his lone room shone with the gleams
Of glorious visitors, who came
Through no mysterious agency
That in a spirit-circle worked,
Through no deep-tranced and rigid frame,
Whose ghost within a cabinet lurked.

Bright as the dew within the dawn
They from his finer soul arise;
They glide around and fill his room,
And make the night without its gloom,
And all are friends, for all have grown
Familiar to the old man's eyes.

Strange soul, so "sadly vestitured,"
So grossly cumbered, and so fine
And sympathetic! It allured
The far-off influences, and thrilled
At every contact. And the world
Said he was "touched above"—"insane
To some extent."

Insane? but how?
Is he quite sane who sees no light
But what shines on the sea and shore,
Or glimmers from a gasalier?

Who sees no visions of the night,
And enters dreamland with a snore?
Is he all sane whose clotted mind
Can only catch the coarse and near?
Who of material things a part
Lives in them, of them, as their kind?
Who are the sane and the insane?
What makes the "touched" and "healthy" brain?
What gives the vision like a fact?
What gives the fact, and fact alone?
What gives the impulses that string
The reason to a lofty spring
Above the high engirding ring
That circumscribes the common range?

Hard questions, that Psychology
Resolves not by its latest laws.

The Parson.

ZEALOUS and strong the parson preached,
Counselled, and prayed, and hard beseeched.
And he was young and sombre-faced,
Straitened in manner, and strait-laced,
In pious black discreetly dressed,
Glossy his coat, and smooth his vest,
Boots shining, and a shiny hat,
An inch of white around his throat,—
A parson trained to feed the flocks,
And decorously orthodox.

Though young in his apprenticeship
Under the Presbyterian whip,
Docile and meek and tame was he,
A pattern of mild sanctity,
And a true evangelical,
Consorting not with Broad or High;
Always the "gospel" was his cry—
Gospel of blood and sacrifice,
Of hell on one side, and of hell
Partly on t'other side as well;
For it was better to be driven
To take the narrowest path to heaven,
Than, trusting to an unhedged way,
Unconsciously to walk astray.
The Gulf was sure; the other place
Needed prim steps and saving grace.

Full of his gospel and sincere,
He preached it honestly and clear,

And tried to lift the poor and base
Out of besotted works and ways,—
The poor who hardly win their bread
O'er plashy drains with dirty spade,
Dull as the clay they work upon,
Plodding their weary being on;
Over their pipes and alehouse bowls
Relieving their unnurtured souls,—
A brutish race and yet divine,
Immortal in the Parson's eyes;
And they to him were close allied
By many loving, mystic ties,
With the Divine, the Crucified.
And fervently he sought to shake
Their sluggish minds by earnest tones,
And words of fire to scorch the bones,
And melt the marrow, and to wake
Their souls for their salvation's sake.

And still they plodded on, and growled :
Love and faith and sacrifice,
And blood and mercy, in their eyes,
Were sacred symbols, mysteries
To look to, when the heavens scowled ;
Or when their old and aching limbs,
No longer pliant with the spade,
Reposed within the workhouse shed,
What time the Parish roughly trims
The lamp of life till light is dead.

The parson had his victories :
Sometimes a wild revival came,
Swift, crackling, like a forest fire,
Raging beyond his own desire,
Causing the poor man fear and shame,
And over all his vineyard spread.
Impossible to keep it safe
In proper bounds ; for crazy head

And softened heart, in fervour fierce,
Would roar in anguish, and rehearse
Their woes and sins, till in collapse
They shuddering sank; and some again
Yelled with the yell of the insane,
And this would grow, until perhaps
In the dim-lighted meeting-house
Lay weltering the Gospel-slain.

But when the fervour ran its course,
And wild appeals had lost their force,
And when he counted up the healed,
His fearful joy was not concealed.
But still he owned some bitter truths—
The madhouse had a case or two;
Some o'er excited took to beer;
And saintly maids and godly youths,
Of whom he made a great to-do,
Loved, and lost their looks austere;

Others ambitious found a call
To preach revival joys to all,
And even within the parson's bounds
Held forth with unction, ranted, raved,
And counted up their heaps of saved.

The good man did the best he could—
Soothed and warned and frowned and taught,
Depressed his own emotional mood,
Altered the current of his thought
Into the old and formal track,
And tried to lure his people back.

A painful, but a noble task
Was his—the task to gently draw
Out of its coarse and hardened mask
The spiritually higher life,
And steady it to heaven's law:
A task too great, for his own soul

But faintly felt the greater light
His Church's ancient creed eclipsed.
He saw the little glints that stole
Past broken edges of the rim,
And sweet their influence was to him,
And through the rents, that centuries
Of conflict hard had slowly worn,
Some jagged beams of splendour bright
Into his inmost soul were borne.
But the divinest ray of all
That lit him on his narrow way
Was duty, work—that heavenly call
He sought to follow and obey.

The Kirk.

A PLEASANT path, with margin green,
Leads to the kirk you see between
The darkening grove of elms and oaks;
And here on Sundays may be seen
In solemn troops the village folks,
The grave old faces downward bent,
The younger learning from the old,
Repressing mischievous intent
And inclinations to be bold.
Here walk the matrons; at their side,

Blushing in innocence and pride,
The maidens, Bible at their breasts,
And glancing stealthily aside;
And village lads, in gorgeous vests,
Return to them a bolder stare,
Or softly wink upon the fair.

Here is the smith with musing face,
For piety has left its trace
From morning lesson on the Book.
The session-clerk, with wandering look,
And ceaseless tongue that only goes
In his own hearing, walks apace,
With sturdy staff, and old back bent,
Mumbling—unheard save by himself—
Perhaps about his local woes,
Perhaps about his stocking'd pelf,
Or, touched by a more serious air,
Repeats perhaps a good old prayer.

The church is here (and lying round
Is the untrimmed old burying ground),
Built at the happy settlement
That closed our long religious war
And fixed a Dutchman on the throne,
Sagacious, cool, and tolerant.
A strong-built structure without trace
Of outward ornament or grace;
A belfry at one end, half gone
In ruin, with its little bell
Ringing with most discordant jar
And jangle, as the beadle rocks
It cautiously on Sabbath days.
Within, the place is passing well
For the devout of parish folks—
Clean, newly seated, windows rimm'd
With gaudy glass, and you must praise
The pulpit carved in oak, bequeathed
By a successful village boy,

Who wandered far on earth, and breathed
His last in distant Illinois.
Upon the sounding board above
Is perched a gilded wooden dove,
With olive branch in beak, and wide
Expanded wings, as she had skimm'd
The fast-receding Deluge tide,
And, poised at Noah's window, shows
The symbol that the Patriarch knows.

Silent and cool and calm to sit
For a few minutes in the pew
My Lady honours every week,
Brings upon one a solemn fit,
Brings back old thoughts and raises new;
For many generations meek
And humble, here have praised and prayed,
And passed away into the shade.
How many gracious lessons read

And rousing sermons these grey walls
Have echoed? And how many hearts
Have been refreshed and comforted
With words of cheer and duty-calls?
What fiery warnings have been given
Of Satan's wiles and cruel darts?
What blinding lights and shows of heaven?

The generations pass the eye,
In long procession without end,
Here as we sit in phantasy.
There is no change—the kirk, the folk,
The psalms, the prayers, the sermons, all
Are as they were two centuries past—
The old and new together blend.
Around the church in solemn sleep
Repose the congregations gone,
And with the living seem to join
On Sundays, an immortal flock.

And you will find upon the wall
Tablets which tell you of the rare
Religious zeal and virtues fair,
Of nearly every parson blest
By ordination, since the day
That ended the Prelatic sway.
Pastors and flocks, from first to last,
Are to the fancy here as one
Great congregation clustered in
The kirk and kirkyard—living, dead—
One whole of the religious life
Of this old parish; for the din
And clash of theologic strife
Divisive, has but faintly run
Its course within the bounds, or spread.

The Beadle.

BUT from these musings we are shamed
By the grey beadle—Willie named—
Who comes, with sound of keys in hand,
Along the passage from the room
Behind the pulpit, where with pride,
On Sabbaths greatly amplified,
He helps the parson to assume
His cleric robes, and *cidently*
Does all his trifling wants supply.
In rusty black, hard brushed, and bare

Of nap, is Willie dressed, and round
His lean old neck is softly heaped
A huge white napkin, limply tied;
A satisfied, important air
Suffuses the mild face; and steeped
In the soft liquid of his eyes
A dainty, pawky wisdom lies.
Nought puts him out of countenance,
Nought will confuse the happy glance
He gives you, as with pinch of snuff
Drawn sounding upwards by a nose
That dearly loves its snuff, he speaks
Deliberately, and with a pose
Half ministerial. He is quite
An oracle, with wit enough
To serve the parish, and he knows
The gossip of its various cliques,
And banters it, the while he seeks
Their little troubles to put right.

He saves the parson many pains
By clever words and wily tales.
When not uncommonly obtains
The parish currency a bruit
Of scandal; Willie finds its root,
And by sweet humorousness prevails
And conquers it, and pleases all.
Most likeable, and popular;
All love him—he is at the call
Of every good parishioner.

But Willie has his weakness too,
The little weakness to sit through
The longest tipple at the inn,
To drive the fun and make it spin,
Till Saint Mackenzie calls a halt;
There you will find him "at his best,"
Gleeful, confiding, brimming o'er
With unctuous wisdom and with malt,

King of his company confessed.
From the experiences of years
He brings out many a story quaint
Of well known reprobate and saint,
At which his loutish listeners roar.
And if far gone, perhaps he may
Touch off the parsons of his day;
For three of them have come and gone
In his official life—the fourth,
The present parson, carefully
He shuns to make remarks upon.
Though cupp'd to full garrulity
He'll only speak about his worth,
His piety, and earnestness,
And labours, which the people bless.
Astute old beadle—Does he know
That everywhere his sayings go?

These are his "high jinks," Willie's ways

Are mostly steady, for although
He has his liking for his glass,
And owns his thirst, nor lets it pass,
But drains the comfort it affords,
He's had his high aspiring days,
And has his aspirations still.
He is the Sheikh of beadles, versed,
As rumour goes, in the dead tongues;
He knows his Latin, and with will
Rolls out a verse with wond'rous lungs
And accent. Once, the people tell,
When an old Roman altar stone
Was dug out of a field and turned
To the inspection of the learned,
Willie alone could rightly spell
The dedication, and alone
Gave true translation, as averred
By scholars of the greatest skill.
And it is said he has been heard

Reading aloud and unperplexed
On Sunday nights the Hebrew Text,
Revelling in the sacred Word,
As it was given by the Lord.
Deep in theology, he cites
The great divines on doctrines, rites,
And textual changes, readings new,
And how dark phrases they construe.
In fifty years of beadledom,
He has acquired a curious sum
Of miscellaneous beadle lore,
And gives it out in mixture queer
Of mother-wit and pedantry.
Oh! he can prove a young divine,
Vain, although bashful of his powers,
Or draw him out, or lure him near
His own confusion; yet a fine,
Soft, charitable, pawkiness
Controls or hides the mischief meant,

And those the beadle half befools,
Are only puzzled, not beshent;
His veneration never cools
For the Geneva gown and bands—
They are high symbols in his hands—
He laughs (with an interior sense
Of awe for all who wear the dress)
At cleric weakness, and pretence.

Sunday is Willie's public day,
The parson does not feel it more,
Betimes he's at the church and sees
That all is so disposed to please
The pastor and the people well;
Then when the flock no longer stray
Around, but all have passed the door;
When coughs suppressed distinctly tell
Of forced devotion, he appears
With Bible on his outstretched palms,

And on its top the Book of Psalms.
He mounts aloft the pulpit stair,
And lays them down with pious care;
A moment looking round with grave
Wide eyes upon the pews; and then
Descending slowly, seeks again
The vestry, to return as brave
Behind the parson, banded, gowned;
The beadle shuts the pulpit door,
His duty for the moment o'er.
Perhaps in the short interval
Between the sermons, he will pass
Among the people, spread around
The grave stones in the lusty grass,
And chat with gravity, recall
Old sermons, old divines and sound,
And half sincerely make lament
Of Scotch theology's descent
To broad church doctrines, vague and crude.

Willie recalls the better days,
When near the church the hostelrie
Was a convenience he could praise,
Which, modestly and frugally,
Provided man and beast with food—
Christians with drams and frothing ales;
Refreshment needed—members came
From distant farms, and while they fed
On spiritual manna, all the same,
They wanted carnal beer and bread.
Willie was there a constant guest,
And loved the happy hour of rest
And entertainment, for it broke
The day's monotony, and was
A sort of fellowship that woke
Brotherly feelings among all.
It was the Sunday's happy pause,
In rigid observation, when
A slight unbending was allowed,

And pleasure, quite canonical.
But all was altered by the proud
Decision of our parliament.
For when the temporal comfort closed,
There came a coldness upon men
On Sundays, and a restless bent;
And as the beadle presupposed,
A real departure from our creed.
Organs, and prayers at home composed,
And views most heterodox had speed,
Since the Mackenzie Act assailed
Our ancient customs, and prevailed.

And ministers had grown too loose
In doctrine, and in work severe;
Their sermons, polished and abstruse,
Were barren of good gospel cheer;
They all the parish fussed about,
And were for ever bringing out

Some new and necessary scheme
Needing co-operative aid,
For which the parsons raised the steam,
And members half admiring paid.

Those were the pleasant times in which
The parsons were content to preach
Two sermons in the week; no thin
Chill essays, but poured out with din,
Strong, rousing, fierce, and full of hell,
That fired and pleased the people well;
So ended the week's work, the flock
Were no more troubled; beadle took
The parson's place on lawful days,
And came and went with easy talk
And no officious surly ways;
No schemes were then, and no bazaars,
No penny readings, preaching stars,
Or big collections; life went on

Within the congregation
As softly as the running brook.
But now—the beadle's place is gone,
Or nearly so; himself become
A creature of no consequence—
The parson's flunky, dressed and dumb,
Devoid of humour and of sense.

And Willie tells us, as he keys
The door, and shakes his sly old head,
That he believes he is the last
Of the true beadles of the past—
That when his bones are with the dead,
You may write Finis when you please.

The Squire.

BELOW the village half a mile
The stream runs through a wood of pine,
A deep thick wood where you may stay
In coolness all the summer day,
And lazily the time beguile
In musing observation. Here
Trooping along the ride you catch
The stately heads of antlered deer
Above their brown coats, see their fine
Light bounding limbs, if startled be
Their wary leader; or you see

He had drunk deep at Swinburne's fount,
Rossetti's, Morris's, and found
The true, intoxicating might
Of rhythmic grandeur, thoughts profound
And vague and deep; the wild, expressed
Fierce riot in the blood and mind
Of sensuous intellectual youth,
Who followed art in quest of truth;
And in the sister art of those
High priests of painting, Whistler, Jones,
The school of sad and eerie tones,
Of cold and varying dimness, or
Of splendours, merging all confused,
Though from confusion's inner core
There seemed to grow a work of art—
School feeling after mysteries
And slender idealities
Of life, removed by many leagues
From the great continent of prose.

A school that drearily expressed
The waste of life, and love's fatigues,
And passions sated; but could find
The charm in life surpassing all—
The charm of art, of art alone.
True art, untrammelled by a link
Of moral or religious chain,
That nothing but itself could bind;
Art for itself; the centre throne
To culture's fealty, to the mind
Of the illuminated youth;
For was not art the only truth
Approachable to feel and know?

The Squire just slipped out of his teens,
Ardent, romantic, all aglow
With healthy earnestness, as are
All youths whom faculty divine
Dominates early, spent his days

In following his artistic bent,
Striving on canvas, shaping lays
That mocked his high conceived intent.
Poet and painter he would be,
Following with courage strong and free
The masters musical, sublime
In rhythmic thought and ringing rhyme,
Masters of colour, and concepts
Original, audacious, light,
Intensely beautiful and bright.
For above all to him they showed
The brightest and the highest dreams
Of all he dreams, of all that seems
Within his range of passion, thought,
Imagination, capable.
He was the scholar, they adepts
To imitate in principle,
But in his own ideal way
As nature opened it, and brought

Impulses that he must obey.
Not a mere imitator, no.
A worker with the masters, so
That the true art might be revealed
Through his creations; but alas!
True art comes tardy to the field
Of youthful effort, and the Squire
Who could so ardently admire,
Found that his work would never pass
His own tribunal without blame.
His thoughts were great, but how to give
Ethereal soul, external frame,
To the fine visions that arose
Within himself, or prompted by
Some half expressed, deep passionate
Imagination, in a book
Or picture?—it was hard to do,
Hard to pourtray the life that grows
So strong and full, and ripe and clear

Within the fancy, and so dear,
Or to melodious rhymes attune
Ideas singing in his brain.
Still ardently he strove in pain,
With pen and pencil, day by day,
To fix the vivid images
With colour words, or colour spray,
On canvas—now in mystic rune,
And now in sombre, misty hues.
Most steadfastly he followed close
The art that finds its largest scope
In the originating mind—
Art, poetry, born of the soul;
A birth artistic showing through
Its every thought and structure whole,
A likeness to its author true,
With nature sympathetic too:
The artist-poet could not rise
Above himself, nor yet disguise
His innate strength, or feebleness.

The Squire would willingly confess
His execution might not pass,
As tested by high criticism;
Feeble in colour and design,
Or wanting the great pulse divine;
Halting in music; like a prism
Dissolving the white beam of thought
Imaginative, to a mass
Of dazzling elements; but still
The mind, the eye, the want of skill
Were only blameable, and not
The principles by which they wrought.

The Squire was earnest, not to him
Pertaining were the silly ways
Of the revival, as it plays
With decorations of the house,
Or of the church. These were its whim,
Its sidelong fancies, its carouse

With feeble, half appreciative,
And fashionably affected souls.
He had a larger mind to give
To the broad purpose and the sway
Of its great influences, spent
In splendour o'er the realms of art.
What were the little curious bowls,
The antique shapes of china ware
Or earthen; or the patterns rare
And whimsical on wall or floor?
What were the tints diaphanous,
The nocturnes and arrangements, or
The hymns erotic,—poems part
Of dreary wailing, and part *pus*
Of brains corrupting? Were they not
Symptoms that proved how minds were stirred
And moved out of the ancient tracks
And ruts of custom? and by acts
Free and defiant of the laws

That regulate the common herd,
Extravagantly gone astray?

Thus dreaming, working out his dream,
The Squire moves on, and whiles away
His youthful hours by wood and stream.

The Old Professor.

NOW let us wander up the burn,
An hour's brisk walk will reach its source,
And possibly ere we return
May meet the venerable grey
Professor, spectacles on nose,
Basket on back and fishing rod
In hand, passing his holiday
In fishing and in reading here.
How charmingly the old man throws
His fly upon the purly wave,

And hooks the red bespeckled trout,
Benevolently pulls him out,
And drops him in his basket bier,
Then, softly satisfied and grave,
Upon the bank rescans his hook,
Or tries another, for the brook
Runs to a deep and muddy pool.
To fish and think, to think and fish,
Through the warm noons and mornings cool
Is his most pleasurable wish.

Approach him, and he'll gladly sit
On the green sunny bank and talk
Beside you, with abounding wit
And wisdom; or if in the vein,
Will moralise, philosophise
And criticise, and entertain;
Re-read you Kant and Hegel's views,
And great Sir William Hamilton's,

Compare, and analyse, and stalk
Ideas to their subtlest lair;
Mill, Spencer, Bain, the latest dons
Of metaphysics, Clifford, Caird,
And the young geniuses who tear
All systems into shreds while yet
Their "faculties" are in the braird;
He will review them and pursue
Their many windings through and through,
And reproduce their several points
Upon the plane of common sense.

Long has he taught the laws of mind
And morals to our Scottish youth,
Expounded and defined, refined,
And in brave flowers of eloquence
Has wrapped up fertile seeds of truth.
You are no learner: he will speak
In broad, unscientific style,

And tell you how the mind is all
But reached, but never truly got,
By half a dozen separate mines
Or tunnels, or laborious bores.

First there are those who think the I
The single thing in all the world;
That from its consciousness evolves
All being, which is just itself
In flux. If mind you could destroy
All would be gone; the universe
Would disappear as does a dream
To eyelids opening on the light.

And there are those again who find
The soul in an arrangement neat
Of things in nature, things in man;
It is a composite result,
Something that feels and thinks, but feels

And thinks because the world is here;
Destroy the world and mind is gone;
Destroy the avenues through which
The I is reached by outside things,
And nought results except a void
Of all sensation and of thought.
The world supplies the pap of soul,
And pap becomes the substance, yet
Itself self-conscious of its own
Digestive process.

Is there not
Something beneath, some active force
Or force prepared for action, on
Impingement from the outer world?—
Some certain basis of the mind?

Oh! here are other Lights who know
How to explain, or think they do,

This metaphysic mystery.
Mind is an organ: is the brain,
The nervous system's centre large,
And the most highly organized
Of all material substances.
Grey matter, granulated fine
Responsive to sensations, is
The seat of thought and consciousness.
The nerves of sense convey in beats—
That may be measured like the speed
Of light or the electric force,
Or heat and motion's interchange—
Sensations from the all without,
To this supremely sensitive
Coagulated mass of fat.

The nerve shrinks, quivers, and the brain
Responsive quivers, shrinks again;
Forthwith a thought evolves; a ray

Of genius to illume the race;
Or brilliant guess that opes the way
To solve a problem men must face;
Or passion thrills the motor nerves,
And strings the muscles tense and thick,
Darkens the brow, the eye dilates,
Uplifts the hand and sends it quick
With gleaming dagger in its clasp,
And aim that not a moment swerves,
Into a beating heart, and heaps
The guilt of murder on the brain.
The current of sensation sweeps
From the outside and agitates
The central organ, and again
Flows backward, sensitively charged
With brain commissions, that with speed
Expend themselves in word or deed.

How grimly the Professor puts
This new form of philosophy!
But he will ask how comes the thought
The product of a nice machine,
To think about itself, to know
That it is simply a machine?
The brain is swept o'er by a wave
Of the nerve force and instantly
Thinks out an action and decides
How it shall send its message on,
Whether as blow, or stormy word,
Whether as hug or brutal kick;
What is it that decides?

Ah, well!
That is a difficulty; but then
The mind is more than a machine;
It grows, and has inherited
Many great powers and attributes,

Has much now that it once had not,
Is a development, in fact,
From weak sensation up to will
And consciousness.

Again the smile
Gleams from the Teacher as he turns
This latest wisdom to your view,
And asks if physiology
Is not triumphant? Has it not
Reached to the secret mystery
And laid it bare; probed with its style
The very centre thing of thought,
And touched the Ego in the brain?
He asks you, and you see he burns
To give denial clear and fierce;
All explanations won't explain
An organ, howe'er organized,
That does its work and yet presides

Above itself, self-exercised,
Self-ruling, and self-conscious,
The sole thing in the universe,
Below its author that decides
And causes action by its will.

He chuckles softly, tries his skill,
With a grey fly upon the pool.
Just as it lightly flicks beyond
A rock emerging, see the trout
Rise slowly, turn his belly up,
And disappear with downward snout
And sculling tail. He won't be caught.
"You see him," the Professor says,
"That rascal has experience,
"He knows the ways of gnats and flies,
"And knows the hook that underlies
"Their imitations; he has sense
"And judgment, and deserves our praise."

We laugh and the Professor laughs,
And as we wend through whin and broom
Upward the stream, we know that hook
Busked freshest, and with fairest look
By Science's adeptest groom,
Will never catch this man who sees
How old and new philosophies
Play round a point they never reach;
And understanding, laughs and chaffs,
With lusty lungs, and graphic speech.

Lies 'mong the bushes many a stone
Moss-covered, squared, and cut by tool,
The remnants of a rural home
And meal mill; still the lade remains,
Throughout its length a dry green ditch,
Which many-coloured flowers enrich.

The house and mill no longer stand
In ruin, but my mind retains
Some memory of the ancient place
When, forty years ago, a trace
Of the grey structure might be seen—
A thick wall, where the great wheel hung,
And caught the flow that gave it pace—
The Mill of Birlstane it is named.
From immemorial time, a mill
With millers' privileges endowed,
Or from the parish farmers wrung.

It has a story wild and famed
In the outlying district still,
A story of the age of faith,
Before John Knox had taught the crowd,
That saints and shrines, and holy wells,
Could not redeem the soul from scaith.

The curious legend only dwells
In living memories, and alas!
What with new science and new books,
And the enlightenment of the mass,
The mythic tales and legends hoar
Told by the cozy ingle-nooks,
And half believed in, may be lost.
The children now make mouths and boast
Of unbelief, as grandam's lore
Is opened to them; and when all
The force of unsuspecting truth
Is gone from listening youthful ears,

Small hope is there of the recall
To memory in after years
Of tales that charmed an earlier youth.

Then lest the legend of the Mill
Should perish with the few who still
Tell it with Doric eloquence,
Here is the story's point and sense,
Preserved in ballad rhymes, which, though
Rough and unpolished, may not fail
The awe and humour of the tale,
And picture of the past to show.

The Miller of Birlstane.[1]

The Miller Sings.

THE Miller of Birlstane stood at his door,
And cleared his throat at ev'ning grey,
And thus he sang like a happy man
As I have heard the good folks say:
"To-morrow is my sister wed—
A blythe and pleasant maid is she;
Oh! the Virgin bless the holy bonds,
And all our joyous companie!

[1] Note, page 203.

And early may the sun break out,
To light us up the hill,
To pull the flowers and break the boughs
Wherewith to deck the mill.
For we shall busk it up in green
And make it fresh and gay,
And dance all night in the broad moonlight,
And make a merry play.

And some will leap the long jump,
And some will leap the high,
And some will groan o'er the putting stone,
Or make the caber [2] fly.
And won't we laugh, and won't we jibe,
And kiss the bridesmaids free?
And rosie Kate shall be my mate,
The bonnie lassie smiles on me."

The Miller's Appearance.

The miller was a sturdy man,
And when the sun was low,
A longer shadow down i' the meadow,
Few other men might throw.
Tho' white his coat, his cheek was red—
He was lithe and big of limb,
He might thank his stars and bless his lot
The strong man that could cope with him.

The Little Wee Man.

The Miller of Birlstane locked his door
And homeward bent in gloaming grey;
When out o' the mist on the green hill's breast
A little grey man came running away
Down the hill like a rolling stone;
He cleared the hedge like a swallow light,
And far above ground he spun himself round,
And danced in the air like a sprite.

The Little Man mounts.

Over the miller he straddled his legs,
Slowly and slowly down he bore
On the shoulders broad of the miller he strode,
And his mites of legs hung down before.
"Bravo, my steed!" the little man said,
And tickled the Miller under the chin;
"I'll ride thee east, and I'll ride thee west,
And every race thou'lt win."

The Miller throws him.

The miller was near benumbed with fear,
And never a word he said,
But he caught the legs of the little wee man,
And tossed him over his head.
But the little man fell as light as a straw,
And laughed with might and main;
Ere the miller could see where he might be
He was up on his shoulders again.

No sooner up than down again,
The miller was not slow;
But fast as he can, the little wee man
Was faster up I trow.

The Miller gains Courage.

But the miller's courage rose on high,
And tossing the little man down,
He swore as loud as a thundercloud,
He would crack his little crown.
"Away, away, thou ill-faced loon,
Thou may'st not mount on me;
Gods bones! I wot a bleer-faced goat,
Leers not so saucily.

"To-morrow is my sister wed,
I cannot thee endure,
For much is to do ere evening blue
Dies over the purple moor."

Now the little man laughed till all the woods
With his elfish skirling rang;
With skip and bound, up from the ground,
On the miller's back he sprang.

A Strange Phenomenon.

"Thou white-coated miller, throw me down,
But every time I flit,
A taller man and a heavier man
On thy shoulders I will sit."[2]
"Then down and be kicked," the miller he cried,
But ere his foot he could draw,
Six inches to view the little man grew,
And the miller stood still with awe.

"Then take me up on thy shoulders broad,
For an' ye will or nil;
On thy shoulders astride, this night I shall ride,
And gallop thee all my fill.

And if thou throw'st me down again,
I swear by my master's toe,
As big on thy back as a bursting sack,
I shall work thee mickle woe."

They make a Paction.

"An' thou be'st the devil I must obey,"
The Miller he said right sly;
"On my shoulders astride this night thou wilt ride,
And sit thee safe and high.
But thou must grant me my request,
Or I swear by my old grey coat,
Tho' thou grow'st thy fill, as big as the hill,
Thou shalt never make me trot.

"To-morrow is my sister wed,
And all will wonder sore,
That I do not appear who love her so dear,
And tears will fall in store.

To-morrow at noon when the priest shall join
Her hand with the lad's she chose,
Is the merriest ride the devil ere tried,
Thou shalt run and win the *bruse*."[4]

Now the little grey man grew wondrous sad,
And he answered him with spite—
"How can'st thou run to-morrow at noon
If I spur thee hard all night?"
"Oh! never thou fear, thou little wee man,"
The miller did gaily say;
For he laughed in his sleeve that the devil should grieve
To ride in the open day.

"Ride the *bruse* to-morrow at noon,
And I shall run all night;
Come fast as thou can, thou little wee man,
And spur with all thy might."

Then up on his shoulders high he sprang,
And out of his pouch he pulls
A bridle thin, of a dead man's skin,
Wherewith his steed he rules.

His hunting whip was of marrow bone,
With a whistle at the head;
The lash was the tail of a spider-ape—
"Hey! off, dusty miller," he said.

The Miller runs.

The Miller of Birlstane quickly flew;
Away from his mill he ran,
Over the lade with a bound he sped,
And past his big mill dam.
Crossing the dam at the edge of the weir,
Down, down the glen he wound;
The little man spurred, and the miller cleared
Dykes, ditches at a bound.

The night grew dark as dark could be,
But the miller saw like day;
For the flame and size of the little man's eyes
Shed light upon his way.
Past the churchyard in the glen,
Where the ghosts came clattering out,
But the flaming eyes took them all by surprise,
And back they ran with a shout

Into the wood at the foot of the glen,
And the little man yelled with joy
When he heard the owl, that dismal soul,
And the shriek of the weird magpie.

They disappear.

He clapped the miller under the arm,
Up from the ground they flew,
High in the air, the Lord knows where,
They rose far out of view.

What happened to the Miller's Sister.

The miller's fair sister rose next morn,
And went to the bridesmaids gay;
"Alas!" she cries, with crimson eyes,
"Why does my brother stay?"
"The mill is locked and he is gone,
Nowhere may he be found:
Murdered by men down in the glen,
Or in a deep pool drowned."

In came the stately bridegroom then,
All busked and fine was he;
"Oh! we'll search all day till gloaming grey,
And bring him back to thee."
They dragged the dam and they dragged the pools,
No miller found they there,
And the glen they sought, and the wood they sought,
And they sought him everywhere.

Ne'er a trace of the miller they found—
Home came they at close of day;
As the bridegroom kissed her, the miller's fair sister,
Sadly did she say—
"Ne'er may I wed till my brother comes,
Though that should never be,
No wife am I till he stands by
And gives me up to thee."

The Miller's Sister has a Dream.

When two long years had passed away;
In the pleasant morning beam,
Some fairy blest her, the miller's sister,
With a sweet and happy dream.
She thought the miller was at her side
Entreating her to wed,
For ne'er could he come to Birlstane home
Till the marriage vows were said.

The Marriage and the Bruse.

The bridegroom was a happy man
When the marriage day had come;
The bells they rang and the villagers sang,
But the fair young bride was dumb.
She thought of the miller far away,
And prayed with all her might
That their joinëd hands might loose his bands,
And bring him back by night.

When the marriage was done by the holy friar,
The bridal party wended away.
The lusty young lads to run the *bruse*,
Stripped off their coats and bonnets gay.
Into the glen away they dash,
Throwing the dust about;
The sun it is hot, as off they shot,
A laughing, joyous rout.

Re-appearance of the Miller.

The bridegroom's house is the place they turn,
And the first is near the goal,
When the miller he ran with the little grey man,
Safe and sound and whole.
"Who first shall kiss the bride," he cried,
"A happy man is he;
Now spur thee well, thou gallant wee man,
For the last I may not be."

Then out they all shout, "'Tis the miller himself,
So here for a stretching race."
And they crane the neck and they swing the arm,
And hot is every face.
But the Miller ran as man ne'er ran,
And the sweat dropt from each pore,
So quickly he flew, that the foremost, I trow,
Could keep him in sight no more.

How the Miller drowned the Devil, and Happy Close.

The miller is hot and thirsty too,
His tongue burned like a fire,
When gladly he sees the clump of trees
And St. Mary's Well draw nigher.
"Now, thy steed must water," the miller he said,
And up to the well he sprung,
When he caught the smell of the holy well
The little grey man was stung.

"Ah! this is some font thou hast brought me to,
Full of holy water, I think."
"'Tis only the place," quoth the miller apace,
"Where the devil's horses drink."

Then down he stooped at the mouth of the well,
And a holy draught he drew;
He spied the cross all covered with moss,
And the sacred sign he knew.

He secretly signed it on his brow,
And the little man sat aghast;
He pulled his rein, again and again,
But the miller was thinking fast.

"See! what is that shade in the water clear?
'Tis black as the devil in hell!"
The little man stretched, and the miller he hitched
Him right into the well.
"Now, how dost thou like the water clear
Of the Virgin Mother's name?"
And the miller laughed, while the little man gasped,
As up to the top he came.

"Come pull me out of the holy well,
Thou crafty miller," he said,
"And never again will I hold a rein,
Or lay a lash on thy head."

"Soak in the water, thou little grey man,
It will do thy old flesh good,
And oft as ye may, turn round and pray,
At the holy mossy rood!
Here are the runners swift of foot,
Farewell, I may not stay,
And oft may you think, as you gape and drink,
That the Miller got well away!"

Then away he dashed with a merry laugh,
And he ran and won the *bruse*,
And kissed the cheek of his sister meek,
Nor did pretty Kate refuse.

What became of the Well—An Addendum to the Legend.

Now the Virgin Mother's waters sweet,
Changed wondrous from that day;
And the holy cross with its coating of moss
Visibly crumbled away.

The Old Boatman.

THE stream flows from a dreary mere
Up in the moorland; it is here,
In an expanse of heather far
Extending westward; not a tree
To break the brown monotony.
A cottage here and there you see
Turf-covered, battered, and around
White-headed, ragged children play.
Near the horizon far away,
A roofless kirk stands, early built

After the Reformation, still
Receiving in its sacred ground
The moorland dead, and its grey walls
Are held in veneration by
The peasants, for its history;
Their sturdy fathers' blood was spilt
Among the heather for the cause
Of Scotland's covenanted laws,
And in the churchyard rests their dust.

The loch is fed by many a rill
Of mossy water, brown as must;
It glistens redly in the sun,
The heather lips it round about,
And the black peaty shallows show
The spoor of many a water-fowl
Which haunts it; the wild duck, the teal,
The water hen, sometimes the gull,
The heron on his stately stilts;

Here comes at night the partridge dun
To wash his beak, and the red grouse
With all her chicks. And here will steal
From some safe cover in the dusk,
The otter, after pike and trout;
The fox crawls slily from his house
Down in the woods, and makes a lair
Near where a tiny streamlet silts
Its mud and moss, and watches there;
A stray old feline hunter out
In search of feathers, shows his eyes
Like fireballs as he nears the edge.

An old man living in a hut
Half turf, half stone, on yonder side
The mere, will aid you if you wish
To try a cast. He is well known
To the Professor and the Squire
And Doctor, whom he taught to fish.

Lines, rods and baits, and coloured flies,
You'll find in the old boat he keeps,
And he will oar you to the deeps
Or shallows of the mere, where lies
The scaly treasure you admire.

There's not a living thing that swims
Deep in the mere, or seeks the shore,
Or on the water gladly trims
Its feathers, or that seeks its food,
But he has studied o'er and o'er,
Knows all the haunts within his reach,
Almost the daily life of each.
What wonder? He has lived alone
In the old hut now close on good
Fifty long years.

Look at the man,
His years are nigh on seventy, but

He still is sinewy and strong;
Will grasp the oar with supple span
Of fingers, walk with steady swing
Across the moor, and lightly spring
Over a streamlet in his way.
A "dour" and yet a patient face,
Uncouthly shaped, and never clean;
Eyes dull and heavy, rarely seen
To lighten: mouth without a trace
Of meaning on it, and a brow
Knotted and ridgy, brown and bald;
Clad in the coarsest moleskins patched
All over, and the old head thatched
With a fur bonnet, heavily shod
In boots with iron soles—he stands
Just like old Hodge come from the plough,
As like a lout as ever called
Woa! to a horse, or broke a clod.
But the old man is patient, sure,

And in his observation keen;
If not book-learned, is nature-taught
In the exactest school of all.
His studies are the mere and moor,
Life studies every day pursued
In all the seasons, spring and fall,
In summer's lustiness, and in
The winter's bitter ice and cold.
No living thing but he has caught
Within the limits of his search,
And handled it, and oft subdued
To gentleness, till it would perch
Upon his hand and head, and show
Its pretty training, bird and beast
And reptile even.

Look within
His queer old hut and you shall see
Many a dusk and coloured skin,

Many stuffed birds, and many a nest,
And half a dozen rows of eggs
Hanging in graceful curves from pegs;
Pinned insects, all in their degree
Of scientific order placed.
Bare skeletons, and old remains
Of skeletons on blue blaize pressed
In the coal-forming era; here
A flint, chipped rudely on its flake,
There a stone hammer polished clear,
True in the shaft-hole, of a make
More recent.

This old hut contains
Trifles that great museums lack.
But the collector? What a life
Of patience and laboriousness
Was his!

When young, he wed and brought
Home to his moorland croft a wife,
And lived some years of wedded bliss.
Two children fair, a girl and boy
Were born, and then the wife became
Dull, dreamy, and at last insane.
Some lack of vigour in the spine
Left her weak, irritable, lame
And fatuous, and the softened brain
Sank gradually into decease.
But he had tended her, controlled
Her wildest frenzies and her moods
Of suicidal gloom alone.
Neighbours were distant and afraid
Of the poor stricken one, whose yells
Rang o'er the moor at dead of night.
Long dreary months this life was led;
At last all nervous strength was gone,
Calm, for exhausted, she was laid

Upon her bed, and lived a corpse
For other weary months, and fed
By his sole patient hand; until
Death like a friend came to the hut,
And he thanked God that she was dead.

The boy and girl he strove to rear
In vigour upward, but their birth
Was fatal, for each coming year
Brought signs incipient of the taint
Of madness, though it broke not forth
Conspicuous. They were quiet and shy,
Simple and graceful in their ways,
And needing not the least restraint;
They even learned a little by
The father's lessons out-door taught,
They had the father's love of beast
And bird, and as they learned they sought
Each several haunt and den and nest.

Their life was innocent at least,
And happy, and the father—though
He trembled as he thought upon
Their future fate, which still was pressed
Upon his parent heart—loved so
The little ones, that life became
Sweet to his soul, and worth an aim.
They had a strangely mangled speech
He and they only understood.
His lonely days were cheered by them;
They ran along with him when out
Upon the moor, or on the mere
Went with him in his boat to oar,
Baited his lines, unhooked the trout
When caught, and with a childish roar,
Sounding to him a lusty cheer,
Greeted his triumphs.

One sad day
When he was at the village, they
Unmoored the little boat in play,
And rowed it merrily away
Out to the middle of the mere;
What happened no one ever knew,
For haplessly no one was near,
But when returned the father—Oh!
The boat, keel upward, drifted to
The shore.

'Twas forty years ago.

The Doctor.

DEEP in the bosom of the vale,
Its garden fence the streamlet's bank,
The doctor's cosy cottage stands—
The doctor, young and rich and learned,
A *savant* with a lengthened tail
Of mystic letters, proudly earned,
After his name. He had been taught
In the last school of "modern thought,"
And was a careful student still.
Nature he followed in the trail

Of Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, and
The more adventurous German band
Of theorists by Haeckel led;
He was of the illuminèd.

Through the dark ages of the past,
Ages on ages, he could trace
The varied steps, from first to last,
That Nature took to form the race.
No break was there, or could be there:
For break admitted miracle,
And miracle is never found,
And never can be in the range
Of the unchanging laws of change;
And God is but a link unsound
Hooked to the far end of the chain
Of secondary causes: hook
Conforming not with highest law—
The law of growth, decay, and death,

Of death and growth and constant growth,
In endless circles, on and on,
Ever evolving from themselves.

From fiery mist our world arose,
And in a fiery mist will close,
Again to form, with sun and world,
Another system, where the force
Of evolution, starting fresh,
May run perhaps a different course,
And end in higher forms of flesh.
Matter, eternal, uncreate,
Ever becoming something new,
Contains within it all—the All—
And everything is just the fate
Of atoms as they chance to fall
Together. Here a soul, and there
A crystal, but the chance is ruled
By the great Evolution law.

So to the village *savant* seemed
The universe. It wholly teemed
With forces ever moving on,
Passing into each other fast,
Forming, re-forming, and no place
He found for spiritual life or sphere.
What was *his* life but a result
Of countless causes, dating back
From unknown ages, when a flash
Electric smote sea-ooze, or when
Some combination rare of parts,
That quivered on the brink of life,
Evolved a sentient movement far
Extending in its potency
And opening promise of himself?
The long life process he could track
With fearless Haeckel; from the sac
Of protoplasm, early dawn
Of organ, rising slowly up

To worm life in its various forms;
Through worms to the acrania,
The skull-less type, that shadow out
A coming back-bone; to the fish
Primeval in the ancient seas.
From fish to the amphibia
And brutes warm-blooded, giving suck,
And feeding in the forests fair
That covered all the early plains—
Pouched animals, whose latest home
Is in the wild Australian bush.

From these, in slow ascending steps,
Through semi-apes, and apes with tails,
And tail-less apes, with larger brain,
Emerged a strain of nobler shape,
With straighter legs and finer hands,
Thumbed, thinking, speaking, reasoning—
The ruler and the chief of life.

And yet a puzzle's in it all—
Why should the movement that we call
Being and life, ever evolve
A higher being, until it show
Intelligence, the power to know,
To reason high and to resolve?
Why does the atom touched with life
Seek upward, till it knows itself?
Why does the struggle and the strife
Lead up to wonder, worship, thought,
In the attempt to reach above
The show of things, and seek a Cause;
Survey, reflect, and, like a god
Explain all Nature by its laws?
Whence comes the thing Intelligence?
Is it a force that hidden lies,
In certain cleavings of sarcode?
Then why that mighty force, and whence
Impressed? How to the formless mist,

Tinted by light of other suns,—
Our wondrous system's element,—
Came this divine and ever blessed
And highest power, the power to know?
Has it no source but earthly ones,
No Primal Cause intelligent?

The youthful *savant* answered so:—
"The starting point of life appears
With promise of intelligence,
Because the struggle through the years
Incessant upward rises still;
From form to form, from sense to sense,
The living force becomes intense,
Till it can reason, think and will.
Why so, we know not: it is there
Like limb and brain, like scent of flower,
Like sting of bee, like serpent's tooth,
Like nerve and muscle, like the power

Mysterious, that with constant truth,
Makes positive and negative.

All is mysterious: we can learn
Only as learners of the whole
Of which we form a part; and earn
Knowledge of processes and forms.
The final truth, if such there be,
Is ever hopelessly disguised,
Beyond the ken of human soul—
For soul is but a process too,
A portion of the mystery,
That lies within the circle vast,
Of which man is the centre true—
We know it not, and cannot guess.
Darkness and silence, emptiness,
At which the spirit stands aghast,
Confronts us ever! If there be,
Filling the void, a Deity,

He moves beyond our orbit, far
Beyond the paths of sun and star,
And comes not near to be revealed,
Is unrevealable, concealed
Like the deep roots and essences
Of all the changing forms we see."

Belief presumptuous, some will say,
So ruthlessly it cuts away
All spiritual life of man;
All worship, hope, all future state,
And narrows down his high estate,
That by the old and glorious plan
Was but a little lower than
The angels, to the product base
Of countless causes and effects;
Of Evolution makes a God
Or underlying power, that sways
The interchange of force and force,

The accident of accident
Itself.

The branch upon the road,
The weed that in the puddle blooms,
Or worm that wends its sinuous course
Amid the mud, or snail bow-bent
Upon his belly foot, presumes
A future of development
As splendid as the rise of Man.
For may not branch, or worm, or snail,
Or weed, in future strife prevail,
And rising upward, stage on stage,
At last in some far distant age
Become a form of higher strain,
With larger limbs, more spacious brain
Than his, who, as high priest of man,
Knows and explains creation's plan?
While man by some pernicious trip,

Descending downward, slip on slip,
Becomes imbruted once again,
Pronounced in jaw, and low in brain—
Than the gorilla greater mock
Of godlike structure and of soul;
Or dipping lower, lower down,
Sink to a shell-fish on the rock
Of other seas. His thoughts, his works,
Religions, and philosophies,
The splendour and the glorious crown
Of his development—all dead,
All buried, and all vanishéd.
The mind, the soul, which was his boast,
Forever gone, forever lost.

A hopeless creed, an awful faith,
That overwhelms with its immense
Relations intertangled dense!

And yet we hope a higher power,
Than Chance by Evolution led,
Has, as the spirit of the Lord,
Brooded above the ages dead,
And over all the change on change,
Transforming fin to foot and claw,
Transforming cry to thoughtful word,
Enlarging instinct's narrow range,
To reason and religious awe;
This ever-present Power, this God,
Intelligence, Prime Force, or Will,
Directing, shaping, worked through all,
Preparing for the higher race
A soul refined and spiritual,
And life beyond this life of ill—
A spiritual life that sinks the clod,
And all its restlessness of change,
That, fired with impulses divine,
A bright development acquires,

And moving onward still aspires,
Through other struggles, other strife,
To catch the purest light that shines
Beyond the forms and shows of life;
To know in full the highest Cause,
The Fountain Head and Source of laws.

The Doctor dearly loved to muse,
By scientific fancies led,
On that dim age when the man-ape
In inter-tropic climes was bred.
Brown, hairy, and with mighty thews,
Head rough with brutal vigour, yet
With broadening brows, and eyes new-lit
With intellectual fire, and lips
That modulated simple words—
Rough symbols of the thoughts that shoot
Incessant from the growing brains—
Or grinning savagely agape,

Showed the flesh-tearing fangs, and showed
The human based upon the brute.

Roaming the forest with his spouse,
Or many spouses, and their troop
Of young brown savages, he reigns
The king of brutes, and none allows
To cross his path without a fight,
For he has learnt to wield a brand
Plucked from a tree, and in his hand
To poise a stone and throw it straight;
Has learned at night to make a fire
To cook his food and scare away
His brutal neighbours, and above,
Bough-thatched, to raise his tent of love.

Time disappears, the man-ape grows,
In struggling upward, more humane,
Herds with his fellows, forms a clan,

And is as chief the strongest man,
A sage, a warrior of renown,
Who leads to battle or bestows
New weapons, which his kin retain;
The bow and arrow, axe of stone,
And shield of skin, and before all
Enforces rules of social life—
Rules that will slowly soften down
The selfish instincts, and obtain
New strength at every leader's call.
The clan must live, and in the strife
Of battle or the hunt for food,
Obedience is for common good.
And he who, by an act of skill
Or daring, saves the family
From famine, or rapacity
Of other clans, is high extolled
Among his kinsmen, he has made
An upward step in morals; laid

The basis of a higher law
Of social action; others will
In emulation follow him,
And task the brain and strain the limb
To earn the praises of the old
And admiration of the young,
With the sweet smiles of wife and maid.

Or one with loftier language blessed,
By livelier fancies swayed, may sing
A song triumphant, rhythmical
And rude, but with a power to ring
Through all the tribe, and in its breast
Live and endure; or one, whose lip
Is less responsive to his thought
Than is his cunning hand, may grave
With point of spear or arrow tip
On weapon handle, quaintly wrought,
The famous action of the brave.

Thus poetry and art arise,
Preserving all the better traits
Of the advancing savage tribe.
Ere these have helped to civilize
Society, arose a power
That moulded mind and morals fast,
So great a power, that men ascribe
In cultured days, as in the past,
Its origin to some high source
That lies beyond the reign of Force.

The Doctor often tried to find
A theoretic starting germ,
From which development of faiths
Religious, shot out and grew,
With wild luxuriance; but few
Of those he favoured seemed to bind
Within their primal buds the whole
Of the vast blossom.

He could see
In far-off ages how the man
Began to reason, looked abroad
On his surroundings, felt that these
Controlled his life. He could not move,
But he was hindered somehow. Now,
It was a beast of prey, and then
A poisonous serpent, and anon
A storm that raged among the trees,
Uprooting mighty trunks, whose fall
Destroyed the loved ones at his side.
He saw, and trembled as he saw,
The lightning flash from heav'n and strike
And rive from root to topmost bough
The tree that gave him sustenance.
He heard the thunder in mid-air
Rolling away, or o'er his head
Break with a doom-like crash; but soon
The clouds cleared off, the sun appeared,

The forest glittered in his beams,
And life was pleasant once again.
And when he laid him down to rest,
And sleep came not with the soft night,
And twinkling stars and yellow moon
Lit up his coat and couch of skins,
What thoughts were his? Thoughts simple, vague,
Of something other than himself,
That shaped his life, something of Might
That struck in anger, and again
Smiled peacefully, and sent him food;
Something Unknown and to be feared.

Fear, awe, and worship; fear at first,
Then fear with admiration fused,
And lastly worship, long delayed
In the slow processes of thought,
Took shape as a religious creed,
Passing through many an abject phase

Before it reached a concrete form,
Before the Fetish and the Charm
Removed a faith so low and base,
We scarce its blurred survival find
In lowest types of form and mind.
But charms and fetishes gave place
As knowledge widened by degrees
To serpent-worship, and the trees
The lustrous reptiles twine around
In spiral rings and folds of grace.
And with this cult coeval swayed,
In the fair Eastern homes of men,
That long enduring faith, that found
Elaborate ceremonial
In groves Assyrian, and arrayed
With darker mysteries on the Nile,
Became the Isis worship vile—
The worship of the fruitful force,
Renewing life eternally

Throughout all nature; pure at first
In primitive simplicity.
Men knew the universal thirst
Of love, and its assuaging source
And issues, and love's symbols veiled,
They humbly, reverently adored.
For love was then the mighty Lord
Of life, who oped and closed its gates.

Then as the generations passed,
And reason keener held its sway
O'er worship, and the varied states
Of human life in races famed
For intellectual vigour, rose
A higher faith that sought to close
Within its sweep a cosmos rude,
And some faint likeness of a crude
And half shaped out philosophy—
A creed personifying all

The mighty facts of Nature by
Immortal Gods—men deified,
Enlarged upon the grandest scale,
And working in the universe
With man-like purposes and will.
A page of history appears,
Written in languages and graves,
In ancient legends and in tales
Of many races, when prevailed
This faith among the Aryan stock
In Central Asia—the strain
Of human kind diverging most
From the ape type, and strongest grown
In structure, and in bulk of brain.

The Doctor often longed to know
What fact of variation set
At first apart these ancient folk,
From all their fellows; longed to read

Their hidden history before
Their great migrations to the West.
But all is dark, for all is lost.
Near to the spot, he only guessed
From whence the great divergence sprung
That gave to brute a soul and tongue,
A tribe developed, highly blessed
With an advantage o'er the rest,
And, multiplying outward, beat
The weaker races; with itself,
Contending as it spread, became
Still stronger and more beautiful.
Thus there grew up a shapelier frame,
A larger mind, more moral ways
Of family and social life,
And the religion that we know,
First owning 'mong the many gods
A Father of the human race,
And stately Mother in his wife,

And Son—a hero, suffering
The worst in battle and disgrace,
For love of mankind, but at last
Victorious o'er his enemies.
The starting point of all the great
Historic creeds of East and West,
And systems of philosophies.

How small a part of man's estate
In pre-historic eras seems
Included here. The Doctor fain
Would speculating start again,
In time from the imagined point
When the more vigorous forms diverged,
And try to trace the lower through
Their slower rise, as they emerged
From man-like apedom up to man.
But scientific facts were few
And far apart, and the ascent

In stages of development,
So little upward, it was ill
To follow back and catch the steps
Progressive, in the living course
Of early progress. The adepts
Had gleaned but little from the past
Out of its many stores and vast.

The savage of the earliest dates
Traced in the Drift, or in the Cave
Of Kent, the home of men and brute
For many ages, had the skill
To light a fire and use a tool,
Though of the rudest, and is found,
However deep in cave or mound,
This side the gap that separates
The lowest living men—who rule
In the Andamans, or who pass
With sad rapidity away,

As they encounter wave on wave,
On the Australian continent,
Of white men seeking room and sway—
From those catarrhyne apes which grew
By variation into man.
No fact disclosed a lower shoot
From the anthropozoic root,
Than lives and propagates and still
Connects, though by a far-off strain,
The Orang and Gorilla with
Man reasoning from a larger brain.

The Doctor drew, as he was bound,
With Huxley, the conclusion sound
And cogent, that the weakest race
Of living savages, as far
Removed is from the noblest phase
Of European mind, as are
The highest apes from lowest men;

Or as the orang, chimpanzee,
And the gorilla are removed
From monkeys of a low degree.

The gulf between the two extremes
Is equal. Nay, the lower seems
The least unbridgeable, although
The broken arches in the one
Remain to show the progress done,
And in the other all are lost;
If in the first Stone Age we seek
The earliest man, then he can boast
A tool of flint flake, and can speak
Articulating; had a home
And social order of a kind,
Married and buried, and had rites
And ceremonies primitive.
The oldest skull that time has spared,
The skull Neanderthal compared

With skulls of modern times, contained
Seeming capacity as great
As his who now rules o'er a state;
Search as we may, no trace is found
Of how the man-ape was transformed
Into the man with speech and creed:
We know not how he shed his hair,
Or shortened his fore limbs and rose
On back-bone straight, with head thrown back,
With archëd foot, and supple knee;
Or by what process came the hue
Of his now soft and hairless skin,
Its brown, its red, its jetty black,
Its yellow, and the tints between;
Or how the straight and flattened nose,
Developed from the monkey's face,
The jaw prognathous, square or thin;
And above all how speech began—
How first the inarticulate,

Long-armed, broad-chested, roaring clan
Of men-apes, out of shouts and cries,
Formed syllables and meaning words;
How, from the jarring harsh discords
Of brutal sounds there broke instead,
Liquid utterances, replies,
Sweet conversation, grave debate?—
A vast development, so great
And splendid that the tail-less ape
At once became the planet's lord,
A god in reason, as in shape.

The Doctor hoped that searchers keen,
Might find before the glacial age
Some traces of an earlier stage—
Man Pliocene or Miocene—
A skull, or skeleton that showed,
The type improving from the ape;
Some form revealing how a broad

Divergence intellectual,
May come from trifling change of shape;
That showed complete, a reason why
The glorious art of speech arose;
How shortened arm, and thickened thigh,
Deepened the chest, enlarged the lung;
The larynx and the mouth and nose
Transforming with the breast and brain,
Became sonorous, and the tongue
Shaped simple words, that grew amain
To language musical, and song.
But though the search is deep and long,
And evolutionists await
With eager hope, the early "brave"
Emerging from the brutal state;
He comes not from his ancient grave;
His grave is lost; his fossil bones
No geologic era owns.

The Blacksmith's Daughter.

AWAY, philosophy and creeds!
Here in the honey-suckle bower—
Which at the garden's farthest edge
Looks on the streamlet as it speeds,
Sunlit and gleaming thro' a shower,
Away o'er pebbles, and thro' sedge—
Sits, with her needle, Isobel,
The smith's young daughter, fair and tall,
As sweet a maiden for a song
As e'er did poet's heart enthral.

Her eyes are stedfast as a well
Of living water in its pit,
When to its depths immeasureable
A zenith star has lighted it.
Her face is ruddy with the health
Pure blood thro' all her body whirls;
And worth all gems of greatest wealth
Is the luxuriance of her curls.
She shakes them gaily in the sun,
Nor knows how witchingly they fall
About the marble of her throat.
Though dearly loved and praised by all,
She hardly knows she has begun
To blossom into perfect flower—
The perfect flower of womanhood.
Unconsciously she's fair and good,
A village maiden pure and sweet,
Her soul just opening daintily
To the young radiance of the day,

That tinges it with blushes meet,
Much given to meditation, too.
Nought loves she better than to see
The red light softly die away
Beyond the woods, beyond the moor.
Then steals she past the smithy door,
Rejoicing in her friend, the Night,
Her heart, her eyes, all brimming o'er
With youthful feelings of delight.
She seeks new life below the moon,
And happy thoughts then crave the boon
Of speech from her red lips, while high
Above, the stars are glowing bright
In the blue Lift, that to *her* eye
Seems veiling heaven from mortal sight.

The little stream is bubbling near,
And many a flickering gleam of light,
Through the dark trees, and purple leaves,

Falls on its wavelets, soft and white;
With pensive happiness she walks,
She feels the influence of the hour,
The hour of loneliness and love,
The hour of softly whispered talks,
The hour of the bright planet's power.
What thinks she as her fair feet move
Along the margin of the stream?
Does she philosophise or dream?
Her father's hard divinity
Is all she knows; and only knows
In her dear soul its better part,
Its softness and serenity,
Its loving, breathing, ardent heart:
Its husk of logic and of prose
Breaks open at her tender touch,
And the divine emotion shows,
In all its truth and poetry,
Enough for her, and over much.

With feelings keen, and mind that sees
But as she feels, the world by her,
In its pure life and loveliness,
Is freshly loved. Does it not stir
Within her breast on such a night
Holy emotions, like the bliss
Of perfect praise and saintly prayers?
Its beauty mingles with her faith.
The Lord of all, whose love she shares,
His Son divine and human too,
Seem moving from the sphere of blue,
And, coming down upon the trees,
Are present in the mellow light
Of moon, are breathing thro' the night,
For beauty, love, and holy peace
Are theirs; and the fair earth reveals
The Eternal Presence that it feels.
Ah! gaze away with shining eyes
Over all the moon-lit view,

Fair maiden, meditative, wise,
Deep thoughts will come and feelings new.
For just as shyly steals yon beam
Through the black trunks and quiv'ring leaves,
Aslant the arch that spans the stream,
Till in a corner long in shade
A dark-eyed pool its light receives;
So, on the calmness of thy soul,
A quickening beam of love will light,
Giving new hopes and strange delight,
Absorbing thoughts and passions—all!
And in the sacred inner shrine
Create an image half divine,
A form of manliness and grace
To love, to cling to, and embrace.
Fair dawn of love, fair musing maid!

Epilogue.

AND now the village rests in sleep:
The doors are shut, the lights are gone,
The moon is down, and thick and deep
Darkness and silence reign alone,
And life is for the time effaced.
All dreams, philosophies, and facts,
And creeds and customs, words and acts,
In seeming death and night embraced,
Slumber in peace with slumb'ring men.
Why should we wake them up again?

To-morrow comes another day,
Comes with the old life and the new,
Comes with fresh light and new array
Of fancies, dreams, and theories,
Comes with bold minds and searching eyes
To pierce the heart of Nature through!

Notes to the Miller of Birlstane.

[1] The author believes that this is the first time that this legend has been given to the public in any form. He heard it many years ago from the lips of an old maiden lady, who was then upwards of fourscore years, and who had a most astonishing collection of ghaist, brownie, witch, and deil legends, which she was fond of repeating to young folks round the ingle on long winter nights. The good old lady belonged to a class which is now almost, if not altogether, extinct in Scotland, for she firmly believed in the truth of her own stories. The present tale so struck the fancy of the writer that, like Cowper after he heard the story of John Gilpin, he could not rest till, with such skill as he could command, he had turned it into verse.

It may be proper to mention that the "little wee man," or "little grey man," as he is called, was a favourite performer in the incidents of Scottish and Irish folk-lore. It is not very easy to define his real character, for he is occasionally half fairy, half brownie, and whole devil. The pranks that he plays would lead one to infer

that he is more potent and more mischievous than the fairy race, and his character scarcely tallies with the great hairy misshapen lout who frequented the kitchens of farmers, and, for a mess of sowens and milk, performed the work of twenty men when the gudeman and his servants were asleep. Wm. Nicholson, the Galloway poet, in his charming poem "The Brownie of Blednock," first published in the *Dumfries Magazine* in 1825, gives an excellent *carte de visite* of this at one time popular gentleman :—

"His matted head on his breast did rest,
A lang blue beard wan'ered down like a vest,
And the *glare o' his e'e* hath nae bard exprest,
Nor the skimes[1] o' Aiken-Drum.

Roun' his hairy form there was naething seen
But a philabeg o' the rashes green,
And his knotted knees played aye knoit between,
What a sicht was Aiken-Drum.

On his wauchie arms three claws did meet,
As they trailed on the grun' by his taeless feet,
E'en the auld gudeman himsel' did sweat
To look at Aiken-Drum."

Nicholson, I suspect, drew from imagination and not from popular tradition when he clothed Aiken-Drum with a "philabeg o' the rashes green." He might with as much propriety have clothed him with a mason's apron. At all events it will be observed that the resemblance between the "Little Wee Man," and the Brownie

[1] *Skimes.*—This word signifies glimmering glances, reflected beams of light, and is applied here to the darts from the Brownie's eyes which glinted brightly whenever he turned his head over the half lighted kitchen.

is in the "glare o' the e'e." The writer inclines to the belief that the supernatural person in the legend is the least harmful of all the many metamorphoses of his Satanic majesty, who in this guise—as a little blasted jockey—went out from his place more for fun and frolic than for mischief to work his pranks upon mankind. Those conversant with the old legends know that he did not always have it his own way, but that "holy friars" and pious laymen sometimes turned the tables upon him. In the preceding story it will be observed he comes off second best.

[2] *The Caber.*—There is probably both an anachronism and a violation of the unity of place in making the villagers toss the caber, as it is, I believe, originally an Inverness game, and not of the age to which the legend must be referred.

[3] Supernatural persons had this singular power in the olden time. Milton's devil could swell up into a stature like to Teneriffe or pass through keyholes. Perhaps the reader will remember the fine old legend of the fisherman who carried the holy child across the river and was all but drowned by the increasing weight of the infant.

[4] *Riding the Bruse.*—Many readers will require a word of explanation regarding this once merry sport at country weddings, now I am afraid but seldom indulged in. Jamieson in his Scottish Dictionary says: "To ride a bruse—to win a race on horseback at a wedding—a custom still preserved in the country. Those who are at a wedding, especially the younger part of the company who are conducting the bride from her own house to the bridegroom's, often set off at full speed for the latter. This is called riding the *bruse.* He who first reaches the house is said to win the bruse." Amongst the commonalty, when I was a boy, I have generally seen the race performed on foot, and started after the wedding party had left the clergyman's house, where it was cus-

tomary to have the ceremony performed. The person who won the *bruse* was the one who gained first the future home of the newly wedded pair and brought back to the marriage party the prize—a bottle of whisky—which was drunk amid shouts and firing of rusty guns and pistols. The custom of riding the bruse varied considerably. Long ago in Dumfriesshire it was not unusual for the bride to start off on horseback from the wedding party flourishing a silk handkerchief, which, in this instance, was the less inspiriting guerdon of the race. When she had got a considerable start the younger male portion of the marriage party also mounted, set off after her, and he who first overtook the fair lady claimed and got the handkerchief as the winner of the bruse. Jamieson tells us that the word *bruse* means simply "brose, broth, or kail,"—the prize of spice broth allotted in some places to the victor—perhaps an appropriate reward for a Scotchman. The Greek crowns were of parsley, and no doubt the Scotch brose or broth contained that savoury herb. The subject is rather interesting. It is just possible that running the *bruse* may be a survival of a form of primitive marriage in which the bride had to be caught or stolen. The custom still survives among the Turcomans in Central Asia.

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